All kinds of art, practice and theory*

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If you are faced with the choice between art practice and theory, of course practice takes priority, because practice as training will develop your skills. Meanwhile, theory stops us with the intention of reflection, and there is no certainty that there will be meaningful development.

But at a certain point we need to stop for a moment to reflect, especially if there is a polemic going on, and even those who are anti-theory benefit when theory occupies as strong a position as possible.

First of all the desire to create confusion must be avoided. Throwing art at the public, whether it praises them or vilifies them, is nevertheless done with the expectation of a response, perhaps we might receive some kind of evaluation, or if we're lucky, a dialogue. And this dialogue will take place using the terminology of aesthetics. Even more so if the presentation of the art objects is accompanied by an explanation of its artistic concept. This is where we depart from.

Can we find a phrase for this departure point, or at least a place to be based on? Every time we seek nature, for instance the nature of art, we become caught between various formulations. Where will we base ourselves? What attitude should we take? The philosophy of language offers a contribution to the field of aesthetics. One of the questions raised has been "What is the meaning of meaning?" and Wittgenstein answered this concisely: "the meaning is use." The meaning of a word is found in the diverse ways that it is used.

If this is so then when we question the nature of things, or their essence, its like seeking "family resemblances." For example, amongst the members of a large family, A looks like B, B looks like C, C looks like D, but D doesn't look like A anymore. But all of them are part of the same family, even though they don't share all of the same characteristics. The same applies to the question of nature.

But that is not what we are questioning, particularly because for the eleven artists that are showing their work under the name of New Fine Art, nature is not something that is up for question. For are they not departing from the claim that they are leaving behind the conventions of art, releasing themselves from the dogma that has dominated Indonesian art to this day? According to these claims we it seems we are not even expected to seriously address the evaluation of their work as art objects extracted from the environment "per se", impregnated with integrity and intensity in considering their form, content, medium, material, expression or representation. The main point is that they have no longer have value as "visual poetry," because they are not intended as such.

So what are they trying to show? With great sympathy Sanento Yuliman introduces the attitude of eleven artists to the audience as such: an ordinary art experience, which has been isolated in the world of reflection and whose imagination is already pale and bloodless. What is intended is in fact the opposite: total involvement and dynamism that motivates an aggressive attack, out of the "interior world" and ending at concrete objects. This dynamic is full of heroic impressions, especially for teenagers, who are most fond of surprising games and dangerous scrapes. This is not reckless scorn, but faith that there will be developments that we want to throw ourselves into.

Do they not depart from the desire to express, the desire to affirm their existence? One of these teenage phenomena is uncontrollable impulse, which encompasses movement, form and content. *Being moved* by this desire to express and involve oneself totally in life manifests in the *form* that challenges the rules and the environment, *containing* the anxiety of a quest. But at the same time this expression is not intended to bring with it temperament and emotion, it

does not personally leave behind footprints or fingerprints in its brushwork, or in its marks. Let us review these expressive characteristics one-by-one.

The dynamics of expression are moved in the direction of total involvement, leaving behind any intention to keep a distance or to be disinterested, which is often proffered as a characteristic of art.

Does not expression assume the existence of a subject who is clear and personalised, with an authentic and integral identity? Without stability of identity expression offers no meaning; it is like an empty echo, especially if we are used to seeking out personal style. As long as there is a desire to express there will be subjects who become a sort of requirement, at least in discovering identity. This also means a kind of awareness and sensitivity. On the other hand these expressions are moved by the desire for total involvement. Does this fusion automatically blur self-identity without meaning anything? Who will be enriched by this blurring, the absent personality, or the totality of life, as the ocean is enriched by throwing salt into it?

So in fact impulse, pressure, self-expression and also complete self-involvement contain a challenge, a paradox; because expression needs a subject and, for the sake of fusion, the subject is lost.

Eventually there is a kind of blind movement, where night moths are attracted by the firelight and throw themselves into the flames. The impulse of basic human instinct for civilization should be slowed down by these movements, so the processing takes place in slow-motion. As a result, the subject cannot be evicted.

What about the *form of the impulse* itself, while its manifestation is a challenge to norms and to the environment? Actually there are no obligatory norms; there needn't be and dramatizing of norms, says Goenawan Mohammad. A challenging attitude is in any case absorbed into the feeling of admiration towards the prestige and authority of the norms that under challenge. If we don't agree with a claim, we can simply be quiet about it, but to challenge it means always to acknowledge it as one pole of power that we wish to balance with an opposing pole. Furthermore, challenging is movement to the outside which conflicts with the formative movements. So this challenges and also indicates its *rawness.*

Now to the matter of *content and impulse*; a restlessness, an anxiety due to the search for something new, and so on. Here is where we find the seeds of what are called "ideas." But they say imagination and contemplation are so close, it is impossible that only from this anxiety and restlessness that ideas and images could emerge. Moreover, ideas are abstractions, and anxiety is an emotion. How can the processing or filtering of flesh and blood emotions become and abstraction, an idea? Like it or not, anxiety cannot be allowed to remain in its raw state; once again it needs the presence of the subject, although perhaps not in the brushwork, but rather in the giving or processing of values and their expression, the artwork.

After observing the phenomena of expression, especially with regards to impulse, form and content seem more clear as reasons why observers will not attain a comprehensive aesthetic experience (there are one or two exceptions, there are still several other ways in which art objects appear); because of their rawness! Of course they may be presented as an experiment, a search, a transitional period or even as new Indonesian art; especially if the attendees are seen as relatively incapable or lacking authority, their presence no longer respected by communication. What we encounter above is the subject, meeting with its own identity, but even this can



only take place through communication. We know ourselves through frames of reference, from meeting with other subjects. We meet the material that we obtain during the art process as subjects too. Objects do not become material again but other subjects that exist close by and which we take out of their functional network. We do not utilise them again, but allow them to speak for themselves. We are impressed by their existence.

Here we arrive at the experience of art that is encountered as an emotion and a “concrete-ness”: existence, the environment and concrete experience. Concrete existence is the result of the subject’s perception, with all of its personal distortions; concrete experiences are inseparable from construction and illusion (Gombrich).

The more concrete things appear, the more raw they are. The most raw, the most ideal, of course, are those that take down the barricades and through them precisely at the spectators; no matter how concrete, surprising, cathartic ways that are both positive and destructive for the peaking anxiety. In fact it is not only artists who are endangered by this, but the public as well. This is a complete struggle, clear and intimate communication need no longer be under suspicion.

Art as communication can indeed be directed to an intimate course. Jim Supangkat reveals that by definition the *expression* that we observed earlier, could also be a *working language.* Working language is also understood as a language for the channelling of emotion or language about emotion. This is the principle debate between Gombrich and Ruth L. Saw. Once again the philosophy of language may be of assistance, if we see it as a language for communicating.

Of course in this age of the perfection of instruments of communication, communication is under suspicion whether it is successful or not. This of course means emotional communication, because the communication of information is usually clear and beyond misinterpretation. In a situation of communication, there are several assumptions: the subject and their utterances and the intentions of those utterances, the listener and their ability to catch the utterances and their meaning according to particular laws.

In the end language is more clear if it is positioned as a speech-act. Even more so since Austin revealed that the function of language not only conveys information but is also a “performance,” for instance in the expression “I hereby declare dissolution.” Art as language is a performance that should be more certain, in relation to implicit matters especially.

But speakers, the spoken-to and the spoken must all follow the rules of the game, an consensus that is always shifting, full of misinterpretation but always with the spirit and faith that mutual understanding is attainable. ALongside this there will always be suspicion hanging over this attainability. From the beginning communication has been thus.

So, if as artists we speak the language of art, then the speakers, the spoken-to, and spoken must follow norms that are constantly shifting, and are certainly not always within a tight net of conversation, but rather one with holes big enough to slip through. What we must be certain of is that the message we are trying to express at that moment will reach its target: this faith and spirit is definitely held by these eleven artists, who deserve appreciation.

